

A “Plan to Heal Their Hearts”: The Lives of Ann and Tat

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ABSTRACT

From 1861 to 1904, Miss Harriet Colfax served as keeper of the federal lighthouse at Michigan City, Indiana. For the full 43 years of her service her companion, Miss Ann Hartwell, lived with her. While original source documents are a record of the lives of “Ann and Tat,” as they were known to their friends, newspaper articles published during their lives and in the decades after their passing (both in 1905) provide insights on the ways they were seen and their relationship described. A difference is noted after their deaths, with an apparent distancing of Ann from Harriet. Through reporting and analysis of news articles, details are revealed about Harriet Colfax and her relationship with Ann Hartwell. A sort of disappearing of that relationship in the news, and an official distancing by the historical society now managing the lighthouse as a museum, are described. While there is no specific evidence that Ann and Tat were lesbians, there is similarly no evidence that they were not. This leads to an exploration of a lens of queer possibility and thoughts on interpreting LGBTQIA+ stories at parks, protected areas, and heritage sites.



“OLD MAIDS PLAN TO HEAL THEIR HEARTS—SCHOOL TEACHER AND LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER HAVE TRIED IT FOR HALF A CENTURY.”

So reads the headline from a *Chicago Tribune* article dated November 16, 1902. The article goes on to say, “Both disappointed in love affairs, two women plighted their lives to each other and sealed the compact by exchanging engagement rings, which have been so worn for nearly half a century” (*Chicago Tribune* 1902: 54). The article is describing Harriet Colfax, the keeper of the lighthouse in Michigan City, Indiana, and her schoolteacher companion Ann Hartwell. Miss Colfax served in her position with the US Lighthouse Service from 1861 to 1904. All the while, Miss Hartwell was by her side. In examining what has been recorded about the lives of these two remarkable women—“Ann” and “Tat” to their friends—a story that transcends the heteronormative is revealed, as is a love of and dedication to place and to each other.

The story of Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell is personal to me as I call Michigan City home and have worked as a docent in what is now the Old Lighthouse Museum, their home for 43 years. And, as a gay man, I tend to see history and conservation stories through my own life experience and with a lens of “queer possibility” (Middleton 2020). In exploring and telling the story of these “two useful lives” (*Chicago Tribune* 1902: 54), I also offer my thoughts on LGBTQIA+ representation at heritage sites, imaginative interpretation, and management of the places where queer stories played out.

On land whose traditional and contemporary stewards have included Myaamia, Bodwéwadmí, Kiikaapoi, Kaskaskia, and Peoria Peoples (Native Land Digital 2023), Michigan City is located on the southern end of Lake Michigan and is the easternmost point along Indiana’s 40-mile coastline. Much evidence remains of Native travel and seasonal hunting

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campes (Meyer 1954; Munger 1988). In a newspaper report from 1902 it was noted that some “Miami Indians” [Myaamia] were present when the town was first platted in 1832 (*Indianapolis News* 1902: 2). “Two hundred years before that the French traders and trappers visited what is now Michigan City. In 1673 Nicholas Perrot, employed by a company at Montreal, is known to have camped where Michigan City now stands” (*Indianapolis News* 1902: 2). The land where the Michigan City lighthouse now sits was acquired by the United States government in 1826 through a treaty with the Potawatomi [Bodwéwadmí] (Mueller 2005). The Treaty of Chicago in 1833 set the stage for the removal of the majority of Pokégnek Bodéwadmik (the spelling used by the extant Pokagon Band of that nation in the region), which would take place in 1838 (Mueller 2005; Pokégnek Bodéwadmik–Pokagon Band of Potawatomi 2023).

In the earliest days of Michigan City as a home to European-American colonizers the location along Trail Creek where it flows into Lake Michigan was seen as a key asset; there, “a good harbor is opened at Michigan City, giving access to the great lakes, and bringing into our midst a large share of the trade which floats on this broad highway” (Packard 1876: 23). As commerce in the harbor increased, it became evident that an aid to navigation was necessary. In 1837 the first Michigan City lighthouse was built, a 40-foot high tower with an adjoining small keeper’s residence (Clifford and Clifford 1993: 61). Just 21 years later, the 1837 structure was replaced by a new lighthouse, located on the same property at the final bend in Trail Creek.

“Bird’s Eye View of Michigan City, La Porte County, Indiana 1869,” by Albert Rugar.



As shipping (primarily of grain and lumber) in Michigan City increased, a brighter light was needed to guide ships into the busy port. In 1858, the US Government constructed a lighthouse on a foundation of “Joliet Stone,” a fine limestone quarried in nearby Illinois. Milwaukee, or “Cream City,” bricks were used for the superstructure. The date of 1858 can still be seen on the south-facing outside wall of the building. Mr. John M. Clarkson, the last keeper of the 1837 light, was also the first keeper of the new lighthouse until he was replaced by Miss Harriet E. Colfax on March 19, 1861 (Michigan City Historical Society 2012). As reporting about Harriet Colfax in the October 23, 1890, *Morning Journal and Courier* (New Haven, Connecticut) noted, “The lighthouse at Michigan City was built in 1858, and three years later a slender little woman, with brown hair and gray eyes, was put in charge of the light” (*Morning Journal and Courier* 1890: 2).



Harriet Colfax was born in Ogdensburg, New York, on December 3, 1824. While there she worked as a voice and piano teacher. She moved to Michigan City in 1851 and worked for her brother, Richard, founder and editor of *The Michigan City Transcript*, a local Whig newspaper (Chapman 1880: 911). She served as his typesetter for a time. After her brother sold the newspaper Harriet sought other work and eventually appealed to her famous cousin, US Congress Member Schuyler Colfax (who later served as vice president under Ulysses S. Grant), for assistance in gaining a patronage appointment in government service. It was in 1861 that he secured her the position of lighthouse keeper (Cincinnati Enquirer 1894; Clifford and Clifford 1993; Stonehouse 2001). When first hired into the position, there were thoughts that someone as slight as Miss Colfax, and a political appointee at that, could not perform the duties of lighthouse keeper. “When Miss Colfax received her appointment through her cousin Schuyler Colfax, sneering critics hinted that if a wax doll had friends at court it might as well be chosen lightkeeper as this pretty girl” (*Morning Courier and Journal* 1891: 1). Harriet would soon prove all detractors wrong and would remain in the position for 43 years.

Most news articles written about Harriet Colfax during her lifetime attested to her tenacity and skill in serving as keeper of the Michigan City light. At the time of her appointment, Miss Colfax was referred to as “a pleasant-faced young woman of twenty-five, and her petite figure seemed peculiarly unfitted for the position.” That article goes on to state, “But time has disproved this supposition, and the verdict is now unanimous that a wiser choice could not have been made” (*Indianapolis Journal* 1895: 4). Her often harrowing exploits were frequently reported.

When she was appointed, the lights were of lard oil, and it was her nightly duty to pick her way along a wet and slippery causeway, often in the teeth of a gale or when the rain and hail were descending in torrents. After reaching the end of the causeway she had to climb up a slippery ladder and light the lamps. At midnight it was her duty to refill them. (*Iowa County Democrat* 1895: 6)

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The lard oil that fueled the lamps posed interesting challenges. It had to be warmed to a liquid consistency to be used. Lighting the lighthouse itself was not the challenge, as it was also Harriet's home. To reach the beacon there she simply had to go to the second floor of the house, climb a narrow, steep stairway to the third level, then ascend a ladder to the lantern room. However, for a good number of years, there was a beacon light on the breakwater on the opposite side of Trail Creek that she also had to maintain.

One stormy night, after making her way with difficulty along the raised walk, over which the waves dashed incessantly, and with freezing spray wetting her garments to the skin, the little keeper found that the lock had been tampered with, and refused to yield to her efforts. Nothing daunted she dashed out a window and climbed through the aperture, only to find that in her delay the oil had congealed and the wick would not ignite. But the beacon must be lighted, and once more the perilous path was followed through the icy shower, and though she slipped and fell, and rose only to stumble again, she at length reached the house in safety, heated her oil and retraced her steps that the morning signal might not fail the watching sailors who trembled for the safety of the keeper as the light greeted them. Strong men said afterward that no reward would have tempted them to trim the beacon that night. (Morning Courier and Journal 1890: 1)

Miss Colfax reported on her harrowing work often in the official logbooks she kept. On one occasion she wrote, "Cold day. Heavy northwest gale towards night. The waves dashing over both piers, very nearly carrying me with them into the Lake" (MCHS 2013: 6). Several days later she reported, "Westerly gale all day, still rising at 5 p.m. 4 vessels entered while the gale was at its height & ran against the elevated walk breaking it in again. Went to the beacon tonight with considerable risk of life" (MCHS 2013: 6). Her logbooks provide an interesting record of the work of a lighthouse keeper and the range of her work and other goings-on in a busy harbor. Of course, the very existence of the lighthouse was to guide ships safely. As the representative of the Lighthouse Service, Harriet Colfax was aided by the nearby US Life-Saving Service, whose job was to effect rescues when possible. Her logbooks provide insights into their critical work.

Severe Northerly gale from midnight throughout the day, with rain & snow. Colder. The Str. H. A. Tuttle was wrecked at the entrance of the harbor being driven by a huge wave on to the W. pier when her rudder was broken and the boat rendered helpless. She grounded at the end of the pier & was soon broken in two by the force of the sea & now partially blocks the harbor, a total wreck. The crew of thirteen men & one woman were rescued thro the brave efforts of the Life-saving crew. (MCHS 2013: 230)

While Harriet Colfax's logbooks (held in the National Archives) cover 34 years, from 1870 to 1904, they tell a primarily truncated and business-like story of her time in the lighthouse. She reports on many of the very ordinary aspects of lighthouse keeping, such as maintaining the building itself that is the light station and her home. She also, in very brief terms, describes what may have been her appreciation of the place she lived, with a particular emphasis on the weather. Miss Colfax's observations of natural phenomena were interspersed with the more business-like entries. For instance, on May 6, 1882, she wrote, "Warm rains. Painted lantern stairs and upper hall. 2 arrivals" (MCHS 2013: 67). On July 10, 1883: "Warm & clear. Varnished woodwork" (MCHS 2013: 78). On October 2, 1873: "Rec'd check from Commander Murray, USN, for \$32.00 for wood for the Lt. H. 1 arrival—propeller" (MCHS 2013: 16). On August 19, 1879: "Rec'd letter from the

"Cold day. Heavy northwest gale towards night. The waves dashing over both piers, very nearly carrying me with them into the Lake."

Inspector authorizing me to purchase 4 cords of wood” (MCHS 2013, 47). However, on July 7, 1882: “Rainy day. Sent to the Supt. a request for 4 cords of wood. 1 arrival” (MCHS 2013: 68), and, two days later: “Pleasant day. Rain in the evening. Rec’d reply to request for wood. Do not allow it any longer. 5 arrivals” (MCHS 2013: 68). The logbooks do offer small details of her life, reporting requests for time off to visit family, the many visitors to the public building that was her lighthouse, and even a visit to the 1893 Columbian Exposition. “Rainy day. Fresh south-east wind. Chilly. Asked for leave of absence to visit The World’s Fair a fortnight in Oct. from the 11th” (MCHS 2013: 182). There is no indication that she went to the World’s Fair on October 11, but on October 28 she did report, “Strong north gale. Repairers finished their work to-day. Left Columbian Ex. this morning” (MCHS 2013: 183), and on November 2 her log states, “Lt. south wind, warm & clear. Returned from World’s Fair this evening” (MCHS 2013: 183). On several occasions, Harriet wrote of seeing displays of the northern lights. She also wrote of her gardens and efforts to improve the light station landscape. On May 2, 1877, her log reads, “Hard frost. Many gardens injured. Very brilliant Northern Lights tonight” (MCHS 2013: 32). From April 5, 1889: “Snow. Lt. N.E. wind, mild. Inspector called. Set out two large trees in yard. bass and elm” (MCHS 2013: 134), and ten days later, “Lt. N.E. wind, clear & pleasant 3 ars. Set out four more trees in yard. Locusts” (MCHS 2013: 134). On January 1, 1888, her entry was, “A bright, beautiful beginning of the New Year” (MCHS 2013: 122). The entry on August 16, 1872 provides a glimpse of her sense of humor.

“This is the day on which the Comet was to strike the Earth and demolish all things terrestrial—but failed to come up to appointment.”

This is the day on which the Comet was to strike the Earth and demolish all things terrestrial—but failed to come up to appointment. The elevated walk was run into by a Vessel entering the harbor and considerably damaged. 4 arrivals in port. (MCHS 2013: 5)

To learn more about the life and love of Miss Harriet Colfax, one must explore the many newspaper articles written about her during her lifetime. They were published in papers near and far. It is in these articles that we learn about her dear companion, Miss Ann C. Hartwell. An 1890 article in a Boston newspaper noted, “Miss Colfax’s helper is an old school friend, Miss Ann Hartwell, and the mutual affection of these two isolated workers might furnish a new chapter for *The Friendships of Women*” (The Woman’s Journal 1890: 1; Harper’s Bazaar 1890: 847). Another article indicated a significant relationship between the women.

Miss Colfax is a native of Ogdensburg, N. Y., but as she migrated to Michigan in 1853 it is fair to say that she is a Western woman. She learned to set type in her brother’s printing office. Subsequently she taught music and formed a sort of life partnership with her life-long friend and companion, Miss Ann Hartwell, at that time a cheery little school-ma’am of Michigan City. For upward of 30 years these little women have dwelt together in perfect harmony, their intercourse being unmarred by a single cross word. (Cincinnati Enquirer 1894: 17)

Further details of the deep commitment and loving relationship between Ann and Tat were widely published. An 1890 article noted that “an unflinching affection has grown up between these isolated workers” (Spokane Daily Chronicle 1890: 4). Another 1890 article, in an Iowa paper, reported the following: “Thoroughly unselfish, each has vied in her intentions to the other, and, as a result, they have lived as happily as two doves with no serpent in the form of man to create a discord in their lives” (The New Era 1890: 7). Following is an excerpt from a lengthy feature article published in the *Chicago Tribune* on October 2, 1904, just prior to Harriet Colfax’s retirement from the position she had held for 43 years. It provides exceptional detail about the bond between the two women.

In the house of Miss Colfax, her confidante and companion of seventy years, lives Miss Ann Hartwell, a tiny, slim, blue eyed woman with curly gray hair, infinitely gentle, and like her aged comrade in many ways. Passing the four score milestone together, these two quaint, lovable spinsters have been bosom friends since the days of their childhood in Ogdensburg, N.Y. Miss Hartwell was a pioneer school teacher of northern Indiana, she taught three generations of its people, and when old age and failing health



Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell

brought an end to her work she went to the lighthouse to pass away her final years with “Harriet.” Here they lived for many years, clinging to the old fashioned habits and methods of half a century ago.

Winter and summer on Sunday mornings these two slow going, weary but dainty ladies can be seen wending away to church, arm in arm, dressed like the fashion plates of the ante-bellum days, smiling upon middle aged men and women who were their pupils forty years or more ago, cheering one another with gossip of the romances of the far time when they were themselves belles of the same town in which they are now ending their peaceful lives. There is something almost childlike in the tenderness with which the two cronies love one another.

“We have never quarreled, Harriet and I,” Miss Ann will say.

“And we never will, Ann,” Miss Colfax will answer, taking the other’s small, thin hand in hers. “Never! That is, unless you again insist on tending my light. That’s one thing you or anyone else shall never do while I am lighthouse keeper.”

And then the queer, guileless pair will laugh right heartily, smiling in each other’s faces as though it were a merry topic (Chicago Tribune 1904: 64).

HARRIET COLFAX AND ANN HARTWELL

A 1902 *Chicago Tribune* article about our sheroes, the one this paper leads with, detailed the relationship between Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell in the most clear and revelatory terms. After describing the long past engagements from which the two women exchanged their engagement rings, it states, “Both women are exceedingly reserved as to how they came to join their lives, but those who are near to them tell of the romantic tie that seems to have bound them together for all time” (Chicago Tribune 1902: 54). The article continues:

Those who know the inside life of these two people speak of the wonderful attachment for each other. The earnings for each were placed in a common fund, each using as she desired. During the summer season the two live at the lighthouse apartments provided by the government, but in winter when navigation closes and the light is not needed, they move to a cottage in town where they pass their time in each other’s company. It is an odd, unusual blending of two useful lives, the one guiding the mariner and commerce on the deep, and the other shedding the rays of education to three generations of a thrifty populace (Chicago Tribune 1902: 54).

Minor details regarding the lives of Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell have been gleaned from other articles not specifically about the famed lighthouse keeper. In 1894, Miss Hartwell was noted as a founding director of the Michigan City Branch of the Needlework Guild of America, an organization providing clothing to those in need (Michigan City Dispatch 1894). The two of them were supporters of the local Library Association and construction of the Michigan City Library, which opened to the public on October 9, 1897. In an article about donations to the Library Association, a \$25 contribution was reported from “Colfax-Hartwell” (MCHS 2012). Interestingly, there was no mention of Ann in Miss Colfax’s official logbooks. Occasional mention of going to visit friends was included.

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It seems that after their passing (Ann died on January 22, 1905, and Harriet a few months later on April 16), the story of Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell took some interesting, potentially deliberate turns. A *Michigan City News* article, “First Lighthouse Tower Built in 1858; Pioneer Woman Held Perilous Job,” dated September 1935, reported the following:

As the story runs, Miss Harriet E. Colfax secured the position from her first cousin, Schuyler Colfax, vice-president during the term of President U. S. Grant. Disappointed in love, she turned to her cousin to send her far away so that she might forget. (Michigan City News 1935)

In the 1935 report, the notion that Harriet Colfax was “disappointed in love” first mentioned in the 1902 *Chicago Tribune* article was used as an explanation for her seeking the lighthouse keeper’s position. Interestingly, while somewhat departing from a telling of the women’s devotion and intimacy, the article does make mention of and provide some detail about Ann Hartwell.

No story of Miss Colfax would be completed without describing her life long friend, Ann Hartwell, Michigan City school teacher and later proprietor of a news stand that would not sell papers on Sunday. Miss Hartwell lived with Miss Colfax for many years, and the two women, so different in personality were alike in one thing—they were both pioneers, both did the unusual for women of their day.

Miss Hartwell's independence was shown in her bobbed hair, sensational for that day and her strong will. In buying a hat it was said she followed the custom of selecting one that she could not shake off her head, as she could not use hat-pins as other women did. She didn't like onions and anyone in a room with Miss Hartwell who had eaten onions was asked firmly to leave (Michigan City News 1935).

The 1935 statement that Harriet Colfax had been “disappointed in love” would crop up time and again in the 1950s and 1960s. In those years, as in 1935, that was the main idea used to explain a rather chaste relationship between two elderly women. After 1935, the words “disappointed in love” would show up in quotes, giving it an air of fact. A September 13, 1950, *Michigan City News Dispatch* article added a whole new layer of story in stating, “She was reported to have been ‘disappointed in love’ and took the lonely job of keeper much as another girl might enter a convent in similar circumstances” (Michigan City News Dispatch 1950). Even the title of this article implies a change in the collective memory of Harriet Colfax. Where previous articles portrayed her as a strong woman, this one, titled “History of Lighthouse Mirrors One Girl’s Life: Harriet E. Colfax Tended ‘the Light’ More than 50 Years; Built in 1858,” now is calling her a “girl.” The exact statement about Harriet taking the position as one might enter a convent was repeated verbatim in a *Michigan City News Dispatch* article published on June 26, 1965 (Kaske 1965). One article from 1979 simply states, “in the time of Harriet Colfax, the assistant keeper was a former Michigan City school teacher, Ann Hartwell” (White and White 1979: 107). Ann, it seems, was reduced from dear companion to a helper.

The 1935 statement that Harriet Colfax had been “disappointed in love” would crop up time and again.

In 1963 the old 1858 lighthouse where Miss Colfax and Hartwell had lived was purchased by the Michigan City government. It had been expanded at the time of Miss Colfax's retirement to house both the assigned keeper and assistant keeper. It was decommissioned and abandoned decades later. In 1965 the Michigan City Historical Society entered into a lease arrangement with the city and began a ten-year restoration project. The Old Lighthouse Museum opened in 1973. It seems that during that time the Michigan City Historical Society decided to reframe the story of Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell.

Perhaps most significantly, in 1969 the Michigan City Historical Society made a distinct effort to create a new story that separated Miss Colfax from Miss Hartwell. It was in that year, claiming Miss Colfax never had a grave marker, that the historical society had one made and placed in Greenwood Cemetery. The Michigan City Historical Society was actively promoting the notion that the 1969 commemorative stone was Harriet Colfax's only and “official” grave marker.

Being somewhat fascinated by the story of Miss Colfax and Miss Hartwell, I felt it was important to investigate. Upon examination of Greenwood Cemetery, I found that next to the Colfax commemorative stone were graves of Ann Hartwell's extended family, including her mother, step-father, and their children. Toward the edge of the family plot are two simple grave markers, one labeled “Ann” and the other “Harriet.”

Further research showed this to be the actual grave of lighthouse keeper Harriet Colfax. Cemetery records indicate that Ann and Harriet are buried in graves side-by-side: Ann in Section C, Lot 4, Block 6, Grave 7; Harriet in Section C, Lot 4, Block 6, Grave 8 (InGenWeb: 2014). Similarly, the interment notice for Miss Hartwell states that, “The remains of the late Miss Ann C. Hartwell were removed from the receiving vault in Greenwood cemetery this afternoon and interred in the Hartwell-Colfax lot” (Michigan City Dispatch 1905).

A question arises from this newly created story about the grave of Miss Colfax: Was it a deliberate attempt to obscure her relationship with Miss Hartwell? In thinking this through, I tip my hat to landscape scholars investigating the ways cultural memory has been acted out on the landscape. They have helped me to understand that the discourse regarding politics, place, race, gender, sexuality, and other identities is played out in museums and historic sites, in parks and protected areas, and on the landscape through an iterative process of remembering and forgetting, knowing and re-knowing. One needs to simply look around them, peer beneath the surface of the master narrative as told in any place, to see the changes and various intents as the stories have changed to serve the purposes of dominant, subordinate, and emerging actors in a temporal as well as spatial fashion. Was the decision to create an “official” grave marker for Miss Colfax done with the emerging LGBTQIA+ rights movement as background? It was done in the year of the Stonewall Uprising. We can’t know for sure, as the key players in the grave marker project are gone and there are few documents in the Michigan City Historical Society archive that shed any light on the decision. All I have located to date is a note in the board minutes indicating that a local person had given a presentation about the lack of a grave marker for Harriet. Further research is needed to tease out the reasons for metaphorically distancing the two women from each other.

We do know that cultural or collective memory is a fluid thing. Hoelscher (2003) notes the following:

By definition, cultural memory involves sharing, discussion, negotiation, and frequently conflict. It is focused inevitably on concerns of the present, and those who sustain a cultural memory often mobilize it for partisan purposes, commercialize it for the sake of tourism, or invoke it as a way to resist change (Hoelscher 2003: 660).

This brings us to some thoughts on the presentation and interpretation of LGBTQIA+ stories in the places we work. In their pivotal article “Queer Possibility” Margaret Middleton wrote, “As queer people, we are used to approaching museum visits as if we are archaeologists seeking long lost traces of our ancestors” (Middleton 2020: 426). Finding our stories often requires that we read between the proverbial lines. This is quite like the process I have engaged in here, reading and commenting on the news pieces written about Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell when they were alive and comparing them with those written in the ensuing decades. The two “truths” I can offer are these: we do not know that Ann and Tat were lesbians—and we also do not know that they were not lesbians. This is a critical distinction.

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Mainstream historians have often gone to great lengths to mask and even dismiss any intimate relationship between people like Ann and Tat (Baim 2016). In some cases, the individuals themselves did not want to be “found out.” It was not uncommon for women to form lifelong relationships and bonds, often living under the same roof and sharing finances as did Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell. These 19th- and early-20th-century couplings were referred to as “Boston marriages” (Baim 2016; Giesekeing 2016). We don’t know the details of the relationship described here. That said, in the absence of detailed information regarding same-sex couples, heterosexuality is assumed to be the default (Middleton 2020). It seems that the Michigan City Historical Society has taken that default position. The default is a decision in itself. Middleton (2020) addresses this clearly and points out the way it masks not only the historical subjects’ lives but denies representation for the visitor to sites that protect heritage.

In western society, in which straight and cis-gender people are considered the norm and queer people are deviations from that norm, people are assumed straight and cis-gender until proven otherwise.... In other words, a lack of active inclusion amounts to exclusion. In this environment, choosing not to interpret queerness or potential queerness is not a neutral action. Even if a content developer does not feel an artist or historical figure's gender identity or sexuality is relevant to the exhibition narrative or associated programming, that information is relevant to the historical figure as well as the visitor (Middleton 2020: 429).

Queer representation matters but LGBTQIA+ visitors to parks, protected areas, heritage sites, and museums are frequently overlooked when the heteronormative default becomes de facto policy. The default is harmful. "Hesitance to interpret queer content in museums for fear of alienating other visitors prioritizes the interests of homophobes over the interests of queer people" (Middleton 2020: 429). Indeed, expanding historical site interpretation to include queer stories, or to open up to the possibility of such, as is the case with the Misses Colfax and Hartwell, has several benefits. Among the compelling reasons to interpret same-sex love and desire described by Susan Ferentinos is that it "is likely to diversify ... audiences" (Ferentinos, 2015: 9). She goes on to write, "There is the powerful experience museums can offer by restoring visibility to a group of people who have been consistently marginalized or erased in the larger culture" (Ferentinos 2015: 9).

The story of Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell seen through a lens of queer possibility raises the question of how to interpret LGBTQIA+ stories. In describing the status quo approach, Middleton (2020) notes that interpreters have followed three unspoken standards in deciding whether to tell queer stories about historical figures. They will do so only if (1) they believe a historical figure's queer identity is relevant; (2) the historical figure described themselves as such; and (3) there is documentation or proof that the individual engaged in queer behavior (Middleton 2020: 428). She then addresses the faults in this approach. The first unspoken standard reinforces the default heteronormative assumption, and creates a double standard regarding relevance, again assuming a status quo visitor base. There also is a trap in reliance on the way historical figures describe themselves—the second unspoken standard. Many forms of naming queerness are recent constructions. Even the term "homosexual" was not in common usage in the period in which Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell lived. And, as I have tried to address here, with respect to the third unspoken standard we can only infer details of their relationship. What we have here may not be the kind of documentation that mainstream historians and interpreters often rely on. In place of the more traditional approach, Middleton suggests that interpreting queer possibility requires inferential, descriptive, and imaginative practices. Regarding an inferential approach, Middleton refers to statements used at Pennsylvania's Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site such as, "A few years ago, we started documenting prisoners who, if alive today, may have identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer" (Middleton 2020: 431). This provides an honest treatment of possibility and allows the visitor to make their own conclusions. She offers descriptive approach as an alternative to inference. That is what I have attempted to do here. Of the imaginative approach, Middleton offers significant insight:

In place of the more traditional approach, Middleton suggests that interpreting queer possibility requires inferential, descriptive, and imaginative practices.

This strategy aims to build queer canon by connecting an object or historical figure's significance to historical and/or contemporary queer culture. Of the three, this strategy offers the most opportunity for institutional transformation because it asks museum interpreters to question who is considered an expert and what is considered evidence. (Middleton 2020: 433)

Employing this imaginative strategy allows interpreters and visitors to assert their own expertise. Describing one exemplary project she noted:

Instead of traditional evidence like letters or newspaper articles, the project relied on queer expertise and imagination to illuminate queer possibility. By looking beyond object evidence, museum content developers can interpret more fully the lives of people, queer or not, whose histories have been obscured and omitted (Middleton 2020: 434).

In my work as a docent at the Michigan City Old Lighthouse Museum, and through the lens of a few others now working at the site, there is a refreshing air of queer possibility and more imaginative interpretation. Again, we don't know that Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell were lesbians. We also don't know that they were not. That is the distinction that is important in opening their story to a potentially more honest interpretation of the lives and loves of Ann and Tat. In the not-too-distant future, residents and visitors to Michigan City and the Old Lighthouse Museum can enjoy the possibility that the beloved light keeper, Harriet Colfax, lived in a committed and deeply intimate lifelong relationship with another woman, her dear Ann Hartwell. Revealing this possibility in parks, protected areas, and heritage places on the American and global landscape gives power to the story of "two useful lives" (Chicago Tribune 1902) and provides inclusion for LGBTQIA+ folks, and by proxy members of other historically marginalized groups.

In my work as a docent at the Michigan City Old Lighthouse Museum, there is a refreshing air of queer possibility and more imaginative interpretation.

The 1902 article in the *Chicago Tribune* that reported the story of Harriet Colfax and Ann Hartwell exchanging engagement rings that they then wore through their lives was followed by a very telling and unapologetic poem by Alfred Perceval Graves. It is a perfect coda to their story.

SINCE FIRST YOU LOOKED

Since first you looked upon me,
And looked my heart away,
My thoughts have never rested
For longing night and day.

As homing swallows flutter
O'er woodland, lake, and lea,
They soar and fly forever
To thee, alone to thee.

And though the mountains were golden,
And though the rivers ran wine,
I'd pass them all by un beholden,
Beloved, to make thee mine! (*Chicago Tribune* 1902: 54)



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